

Apology

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Summary: Walter apologizes to Ralph for snapping at him but the young genius turns the tables on him. And Mr. 197 doesn't even see it coming. Set at the end of Episode 02x22 - Hard Knox.

Apology

Disclaimer: I own nothing Scorpion.

I know I still have to post the final chapter of ****_Salty Sweet_****. Things have just been crazy lately... but it's on my radar and I hope to get it edited and up sometime next weekend.

This short little one-shot has been rolling around my head since I saw the sneak peeks for Hard Knox last week. It was quick and easy and I had to get it out of my brain. Since the episode hasn't aired yet, there are some spoiler's here so ye have been warned.

Thanks, as always, for reading and reviewing.

Enjoy!

* * *

><p>Apology_**

Walter stood at the entrance to the kitchen, his hands shoved in his pockets and his lips pursed as he watched the young boy flipping through yet another box of files looking for his coding bookmarks.

Paige barely spoke to him during their case today, only communicating with him directly when absolutely necessary. Walter knew he screwed up earlier and he wanted to speak with her about it, especially about what she said before she stomped away after Ralph. But when they

returned to the garage Tim asked her to grab a coffee with him and before Walter could interject that he wanted to talk to her, she and Tim were out the door and on their way to Kovelsy's.

Similarly, Ralph hadn't spoken to him either. Walter knew he owed the young genius an apology, and although he was better at it these days, thanks to Paige, apologies still didn't roll off his tongue easily.

He could tell Ralph knew he was there but, while the boy would usually look up and say hello to him, this time he kept his head down and focused on his work. But as one genius to another, Walter knew Ralph was anything but focused on his task at that moment.

Walter had never, in the almost two years since Paige and Ralph had come into his life, snapped at the boy. It has shocked him as much as it had Ralph and Paige even though it took Paige telling him off for him to realize it. The young genius hadn't deserved his anger and frustration and agitation and Walter inhaled a quiet breath as walked closer to the table.

"Ralph, I'm sorry I snapped at you earlier, buddy," Walter said softly even though there was no one in the garage to overhear them. "I wasn't angry at you. I'm angry at myself and I took it out on you."

It took Ralph one hundred and thirty seven seconds before he responded. But Walter had expected as much so he waited patiently.

"Why are you angry?" Ralph asked, without looking up, and although it wasn't acceptance of his apology, Walter took it as a good sign.

"Because I didn't protect you," Walter admitted as he took his hands out of his pockets and sat down in the chair on the opposite side of the table.

"What do you mean?" Ralph lifted curious eyes to look at his mentor.

"I should have been at your presentation. Not halfway around the world."

Ralph looked at Walter with a puzzled expression.

"If I'd been there I might have suspected what your professor was thinking when he failed you," the genius explained. "Toby might have been able to read him and we would have been able to prevent him from stealing your work."

Ralph sat back in his chair. "You know that is illogical thinking, right?"

"Not this time," Walter shook his head in disagreement. "I promised your mom I would always protect you both and I failed."

"You were doing something important," Ralph argued but Walter interrupted him.

"There is nothing more important to me than you," the genius replied before adding quietly under his breath, "And your mom."

Walter could see in Ralph's eyes that he'd heard him but mercifully the young boy didn't call him out. Instead Ralph sighed and leaned forward again to go back to his work.

"I heard my mom yelling at you after I walked away," Ralph said casually and Walter cringed at the memory.

"Yeah," he admitted ruefully. "I deserved it."

Ralph didn't disagree and it made Walter's lips curve up on the right. He was so much like his mother and every time Walter pondered that it made his chest throb.

"She doesn't understand us sometimes," Ralph replied as he grabbed another stack of papers out of the box at his feet.

"I know," Walter agreed. "But she does know us both pretty well and better than I'd like." That knowledge also made Walter's chest throb, even as illogical as that was. "And I do also forget sometimes that you aren't exactly like me."

"She is right, I am like you. But not exactly like you."

"Be grateful for that, Ralph."

"But I'm enough like you to know, logically, that you reacted the way I would have if she wasn't my mom. I'll never be like her but I'm enough like her, too, to feel emotions better than you."

Walter scratched the back of his head as he pondered Ralph's words. "I don't believe in luck but you were given a remarkable gift to have her as your mom. I know my mother cares about me but I wish she would have fought for me the way your mom fights for you. Maybe I wouldn't be as difficult to understand."

"My mom will always struggle to understand us."

Walter nodded his head in agreement as he lifted his hands onto the table, folding his fingers together. "But she tries more than anyone should. Most people would have given up on me by now."

"My mom never gives up on the people she loves," Ralph insisted as he looked up at Walter once again.

"Yeah," Walter muttered as he pursed his lips because he was afraid today might have been the last straw and Paige had finally given up on him. The implications of that possibility were unfathomably to him.

"I don't like it when she threatens to leave Scorpion," the young genius admitted quietly.

"I find it hard to breathe when those words come out of her mouth," Walter swallowed as her voice echoed in his ears again.

Ralph shrugged halfheartedly as he looked away. "I don't think she'd ever do it but it still worries me."

"She'll do anything to protect you," Walter said confidently and he waited for Ralph's eyes to meet his again before he added, "And she should."

"Leaving will not protect me," Ralph insisted. "But that's not what worries me. I worry about you."

Walter looked surprised. "Why would you worry about me?"

"Because that last time we left you almost died." Ralph's voice was small and hesitant, almost as if he was afraid of how Walter would react to his bringing it up.

"That wasn't you or your mom's fault," Walter insisted fervently. "Yes I was upset about our argument but I was fully responsible for my actions that night." Walter paused debating whether or not he should say his next words but decided it was important for Ralph to know. "There's a good chance someday I'll say or do something that will push her away for good but even if she does decide to leave Scorpion because of me, you will always have a place here, Ralph. Always. And so will she."

"Why don't you tell her how you feel about her, Walter?" Ralph asked suddenly changing the subject.

"Iâ€¦ Iâ€¦ d..don't," Walter stuttered as he started to deny his feelings for Paige once again. But the look in Ralph's eyes told him the boy saw right through him. Even better than Toby, who had been harping on him for months about his feelings for the team's liaison.

Ralph crossed his arms and arched a brow at him, mimicking Paige, exactly; right down the way her nose scrunched just slightly when she was waiting for him try to talk his way out of something. That look was going to be Walter's his downfall one of these days.

"It's complicated, Ralph," he finally said with a heavy sigh.

"Only because you make it complicated."

Walter leaned back in his chair. "Your mom deserves better than I will ever be able to give her."

"You're right," Ralph agreed and Walter felt his stomach clench at the knowledge that this boy who he thought of as a son believed he wasn't good enough. The disappointment, and dare he say, hurt slammed into him full force and Walter cleared his throat uncomfortably as he stood up.

"Yesâ€¦.. wellâ€¦. there you have it."

"But," Ralph continued as he grabbed the Walter's sleeve before the genius could walk away. Walter stopped and looked at the table rather than at Ralph. "What if what my mom wants is just what you are able to give her?" Walter's eyes slid back to Ralph's face as he looked up at him. "My mom may not be a genius but she's smart, smart enough to know what you're capable of giving her. And she still wants to be with you."

"You don't know that," Walter said as his chest started throbbing.

"Yes, I do," Ralph insisted as he let Walter's sleeve go.

"She and Tim are getting close. He can give her what she needs emotionally. I'll never be able to do that no matter how much I may want to."

Walter's words sounded hollow and forced even to him.

"How do you know what my mom needs?" Ralph asked knowingly. "Have you asked her?"

"I'll only hurt her, Ralph," Walter said in a defeated tone as he dropped back down into the chair across from the young genius. "Your mom is too important to me, to my very existence, now, to risk losing her because of my shortcomings."

"You're going to lose her if you don't take a chance, Walter," Ralph replied, the earnestness in his words proving, once again, how wise beyond his years he was. "I don't tell her very often but I love her as much as I'm capable of loving anyone and more than I'll ever be able to show her. And I want her to be happy. Tim's a nice guy. He's nice to me and he's nice to her. He makes her smile and laugh."

Walter gritted his teeth as he felt a wave of nausea come over him.

"But you make her laugh and smile more," Ralph continued pulling Walter back from the images of Paige and Tim together that has started swirling through his mind. "You make her the happiest I've ever seen her and I know she loves you. So tell me, Walter, do you love her too?"

Walter's chest throbbed again. He felt his palms start to sweat as Ralph held his gaze and, in that moment, Walter knew he had a choice. He could lie or he could tell the truth but either choice he made, Walter knew Ralph would see right through him. So, in the end it wasn't much of a choice at all.

"As much as I'm capable of loving anyone and more than I'll ever be able to show her," Walter answered by reiterating Ralph's words verbatim. The conviction with which he said it was not surprising to either genius.

Ralph's lips curved slightly with what looked like triumph. But he just shrugged casually as if Walter had not just declared his undying love for the boy's mother.

"Then to quote Toby get your head out of your ass and do something about it." Walter blinked in surprise before Ralph continued. "Like I said, Tim's a nice guy but I don't want any man to be my stepfather except you, Walter."

Walter choked a little as a strangled sound escaped his throat. Surely the throbbing in his chest was not normal. Maybe he was having a heart attack.

"So now that you've apologized to me," Ralph said as he went back to his work. "Which I appreciate, by the way, but it was completely unnecessary. Logically I knew you didn't mean it. And my mom probably did too even though she went all mama bear on you."

Walter wanted to tell him that it was completely necessary but he couldn't form words as his brain wasn't able to get past Ralph's previous sentence.

"But now it's time to man up," Ralph continued, again using one of Toby's signature phrases, "And tell my mom that she's worth taking a chance for. She is worth it, isn't she Walter?"

Ralph looked up at him again and Walter could see hope in his gaze.

"She's everything," Walter whispered over the lump in his throat. "But I'm not ready for her, Ralph." His eyes implored the young genius to understand. "I want to beâ€¦ but I'm not."

"She probably knows that too," Ralph nodded his head in understanding before looking back down to the papers in front of him. "But you have to give her a reason to wait."

Walter looked at the boy who had become like a son to him. He knew Ralph was right. He needed to give Paige a reason not to give up on him. But telling her, asking her to wait, terrified him because he wasn't sure if he would ever be ready. But if he didn't, he would very likely lose Paige to Tim or someone like him and for the first time that terrified Walter more.

But there was nothing he could do about it at the moment. Paige was off having _coffee with Tim._

"Why did you just shudder?" Ralph asked as he looked up from the stack of papers in front of him.

"No reason," Walter replied quickly not about to broach the topic of how much he despised the time Paige spent with Tim. As mature and intelligent as Ralph was for his age, that wasn't something he needed to hear. So he decided to change the subject.

"Can I help you try to find your bookmarks again?"

"Sure," Ralph said as he pushed a stack of papers in front of Walter. "But I think you should still stick to sine curves."

"Okay," Walter murmured in agreement as he started scanning the document.

"Walter," Ralph said quietly a few seconds later.

"Yes, Ralph?" Walter said as he looked up.

"I accept your apology."

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As both geniuses focused on their tasks at hand, neither of them noticed the woman standing on the other side of the kitchen wall.

She'd heard the majority of their conversation starting from when Walter admitted he'd failed Ralph by not protecting him.

As she blinked back the tears that both Walter and her son's words invoked, Paige knew all three of them were going to be alright.

But first she and Tim needed to have a talk.

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><p>Thanks again for reading and reviewing.<p>

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